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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to test the hypothesis that male influences both at home and at school would promote a positive self-concept in preschool children. More specifically, it was thought that preschoolers with both a father at home and a male teacher at school would have a slightly more positive self-concept than preschoolers with either a father at home or a male preschool teacher. In turn, this second group of preschoolers was hypothesized to have a higher positive self-concept than those preschoolers with neither a father at home nor a male preschool teacher. Subjects of the study were 230 preschool children drawn from Head Start programs in Texas which employed male teachers. Children were assessed through use of the Self-Concept and Motivation Inventory (SCAMIN) which measured overall self-concept in relation to school. Results showed that having a significant male in the home and having a male teacher significantly improved the self-concept of the student; however, this significance extended only to the male students in the study. Because the original hypothesis was only partially supported, it was concluded that the influence of male teachers, in general, does not seem to extend to children on those variables over which the teachers have only an indirect influence (i.e., gender concepts and attitudes toward school and self). (DST)

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The Male's Role in Early Childhood Education

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Running Head: THE MALE'S ROLE

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Abstract

Lee and Wolinsky, in 1973, hypothesized that providing male teachers for young children would provide male role models for both boys and girls, would allow males to help teach young children that men can engage in female-type activities, and would increase the chances of creating a nonsexist educational environment for young children. These points, in turn, supposedly would promote a positive self-concept among their young students, especially among the boys. The following study was conducted to test the hypothesis that male influences (both at home and at school) will promote a positive self-concept in preschoolers.

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In 1972, less than 2% of all teachers of grades three and below were men, according to National Education Association statistics (cited by Lee, 1976). Although the influence of males in early childhood had been considered in subjective literature since the early 1940s, it was not until the 1970s that empirical researchers addressed the issue of the effects of male teachers on young children (Robinson, 1979).

Introduction

Kendall suggested, in 1972, that young children are "caught in a feminine world" of mothers and female teachers. During their early years, many children spend an overwhelming amount of time with women, having relatively little exposure to men (Suguwara, O'Neill, & Edelbrook, 1976). This imbalance, they postulated, might have a negative impact on personality development.

Those adopting this perspective believe that employing more men as preschool teachers will facilitate and even accentuate sex-role identification among young children, especially among boys. This feeling is strengthened in light of both the prevalence of homes with no primary male figure and "feminized education" (Gold & Reis, 1978).

On the other hand, there are those who argue the opposite in current literature. They state that these children will see that even a man can care about them (Seifert, 1974) and can be nurturing, loving, understanding, just as a woman (Lowe, 1981). Lee and Wolinsky (1973) hypothesized that providing male teachers for young children would provide male role models for both boys and girls, would allow males to help teach young children that men can engage in female-type activities, and would increase the chances of creating a nonsexist educational environment for young children. These points, in turn, may help to promote a positive self-concept.

In spite of the great number of studies completed during the 1970s, none were able to prove or disprove these hypotheses. The following study was conducted to test the last hypothesis that male influences (both at home and at school) will promote a positive self-confidence in preschoolers. Thus, it is hypothesized that preschoolers with both a father at home and a male teacher at school will have a slightly more positive self concept than preschoolers with either a father at home or a male preschool teacher, who in turn will rate slightly more positive than those preschooler with neither a father at home nor a male preschool teacher.

Method

Sample

The subjects of this study were 230 preschool children drawn from six of the 12 Head Start programs in Texas which employed one or more male in the teaching role. These programs were found in five cities (Bay City, Brownwood, Comanche, Dallas, and El Paso).

The children (124 males and 106 females) were mainly four- and five-year-olds and, racially, nearly evenly divided among whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Of the subjects' families, incomes ranged from under $5,000 to over $20,000 per year; 84.7% had at least two children and 12.2% had five or more.

The students' teachers (10 males and 10 females) were divided approximately evenly as to race, both male and female. Of the subjects, 55.2% were in a male's classroom, while the remaining 44.8% were taught by a female. (For further information concerning the selected sample, see Riley, Holmes, & Cornwell, 1985.)

Instruments and Measures

The first measure employed was a very general survey. This survey, completed by either the researcher or the teacher, collected data concerning the individual, his/her family, and his/her Head Start program and surrounding area.

The second and more complex measure employed was the Self-Concept and Motivation Inventory (hereafter referred to as the SCAMIN). This inventory, according to its authors (Milchus, Farrah, & Reitz, 1967 & 1968), is appropriate from age four to the end of kindergarten and measures overall self-concept. The SCAMIN defines self-concept as how a child views his/her role as a learner in school, as the student's sum of experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about school and schoolwork.

Self-concept, according to Milchus et al. (1967 & 1968), is made up of role expectations (i.e., the positive acceptance of the aspirations and demands that the student thinks others --significant others-- expect of him) and self-adequacy (i.e., the positive regard with which a student views his present and future responsiblities of success). These highly correlated factors, when combined in one scale, produce a single score with a split-half reliability of .79.

Results and Analysis

To determine whether significant males do in fact have a positive influence on the self-concept of preschoolers, SCAMIN scores were computed and correlated with data collected from the general information survey which was completed during the researcher's visit to the Head Start

centers. This data included information concerning significant males in the child's home and classroom, as well as socioeconomic and family conditions.

Preliminary analysis were conducted to determine the overall breakdown of the subjects' self-concepts. It was found that, of the 230 students considered, 32.2% (n=74) scored as having a low self-concept; 36.1% (n=83), an average self-concept; and 31.7% (n=73), a high self-concept.

Analyses of variance were ran to determine which of the relevant factors might contribute to the determination of self-concept level. Of those factors considered (i.e., sex of the subject, sex of the teacher. significant male in home, number of siblings, and yearly family income), none proved to be a significant indicator by itself.

Subjects were then divided into four classes (referred to as "Roles 1-4"), according to whether there was a significant male in their home (62.6%) and whether their teacher was a male (55%) or female (45%). Of these four classifications, only one -- having a significant male in the home AND having a male teacher -- proved, through crosstabulations with SCAMIN scores, to significantly improve the the self-concept of the student involved and, even then, only significance extended only to the male students in the study.

To determine significant confounders to the differing self-concept levels, several analyses of covariance were ran. These analyses determined that neither the race of the teacher, the number of siblings, nor the family's yearly income combined with the variable referred to as "Role" to confound the results discussed above.

Discussion

When these results are considered as a whole, it seems that the original hypothesis was only partially supported. This is true in that only male subjects with both a significant male at home and a male teacher were proven to have a significantly higher self-concept than any other group.

We must, thus, accept that current results tend to concur with the findings of Gold, Reis, and Berger (1977). They found that the influence of male teachers, in general, does not seem to extend to subjects on variables which the teachers have only an indirect influence (i.e., gender concepts and attitudes toward school and self).
While it is impractical, if not impossible, to put each and every male Head Start student in a male teacher's classroom, it is possible for us to draw some practical implications for the Head Start program. Most important among these implications is the realization that, although not

statistically significant, there are obviously effects, positive yet practical, of having males involved with children at an early age, both in the family and in the Head Start program. (See Gold & Reis, 1978). Therefore, it is our responsibility to encourage, even to promote, a male's involvement in early childhood education.

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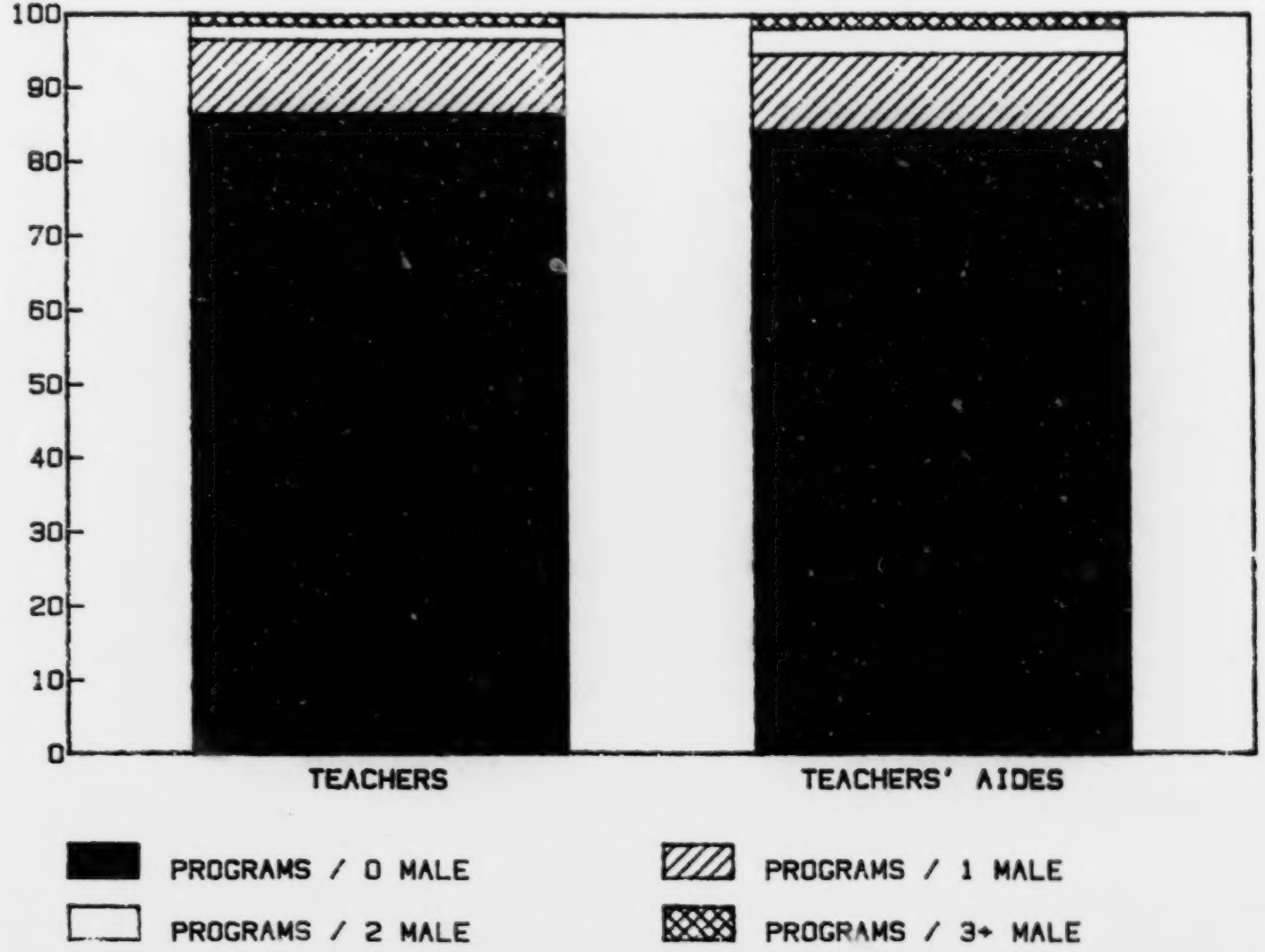
REGION VI HEAD START PROGRAMS



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